



# NEW BEGINNINGS E-BLAST



## Message from the Interim Conference Minister

"I am changing  
 Trying every way I can  
 I am changing  
 I'll be better than I am.  
 I'm trying  
 To find a way  
 To understand.  
 But I need  
 I need  
 I need your help.  
 I am changing  
 Seeing everything so clear.  
 I am changing.  
 I'm gonna start right now right here." ("I am Changing" from Dream Girls.)



In Dream Girls, 2007, Jennifer Hudson sings, "I am Changing" playing the character Effie White, based upon the true life of Florence Ballard. Ballard was an original member of Supremes who sang on 16 top 40 songs 10 of which were the #1 songs in America. Her character was excellent. Then conflict came and Motown executive Berry Gordy removed from the group. She later struggled in life when an attempt of a solo career with ABC records failed. She found herself in poverty, disillusioned and in despair. Life was not every kind to her. She died of a heart attack at age 32. Don't stop reading because later you'll get the "rest of the story."

As I have been assessing and reflecting upon the Illinois Conference and our covenanted congregations, I often find myself reflecting on the song, "I am Changing." Similar to most of your churches, and maybe you as an individual, we find ourselves in the conference desiring that the "good old days" return.

Sisters, brothers, and sibling in Christ, I regret to have to restate the truth that you already know in your hearts, "Yesterdays hay days are gone and not coming back!" I am aware that reading this will cause some distress in many of you.

I apologize. And yet, I don't. We need to hear this hard message. We will either change our way of being at all levels of the church, engage in new ways of living out ministry in our local communities and in the world or we will die as an institution.

The reality is that we cannot afford to simply pretend that "everything is fine." It is not. This reality slaps me in the face daily as I see that we, as a conference, are \$250,000 below Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM) giving from a year ago. That deficit causes me to reflect on the ways that we must change. It also makes me think about how our associations, pastors and local churches understand "covenant." We cannot simply understand covenant when we need something from each other and then throw it away and lift up the banner of "autonomy" when we don't. We are covenantal partners. My staff and I will ask ourselves how we can better engage you, as our covenant partners, to meet your needs and provide the ministry and services you expect.

I also invite you, individually and as associations, pastors and local congregations to ask yourselves what covenant means to you? How can we mutually engage each other for the greater good of the body so that we might truly be a united covenantal community of faith and mutual support.

The song says. "I'll be better than I am. I'm trying to find a way; to understand. But I need, I need, I need your help. I am changing. Seeing everything so clear."

We, the Illinois Conference Staff, are changing. We strive to better serve and engage you, our partners in ministry. We also need your help. And I am certain you need ours too. Our ministries are funded through your faithful giving to OCWM. Your faithful support allows us to resource your associations, many committees; educate pastors and our local congregations. There are many requests daily for Conference Staff time, resources, search and call, financial assistance, LEEAP Grants, administrative help, financial services, property management, demographic information about your communities, coaching, problem solving, navigating bureaucratic systems and so many other resources and services that the conference provides.

And yet, I wonder--are we meeting the needs of our associations, pastors and congregations in the most efficient way? I ask that you email me your expectations from us at the conference level. I need to hear from you, as we are changing. Send me your suggestions and tell me what you need from your conference staff. Send your comments to [ilconfjusto@gmail.com](mailto:ilconfjusto@gmail.com).

**And now the rest of the story:** Florence Ballard was posthumously inducted to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as a member of the Supremes in 1988. Her gifts as an artist were recognized as a singer and founding member of the Supremes.

Rev. Justo González II  
Interim Conference Minister  
Ministro de la Conferencia Interino

### **Pastor Justo's Upcoming Preaching Schedule:**

Sunday, Jan. 20, 2019, St. Paul's UCC, Monee, Ill.  
Sunday, Jan. 27, 2019, First Congregational UCC, Malta, Ill.  
Sunday, Feb. 3, 2019, Westchester Community Church UCC, Westchester, Ill.  
Sunday, Feb. 10, 2019, Bethel UCC, Elmhurst, Ill.  
Sunday, Feb. 17, 2019, Congregational UCC, Arlington Heights, Ill.

Would your congregation like Rev. Justo Gonzalez, II, our Interim Conference Minister to preach in your community? Contact him directly at [ilconfjusto@gmail.com](mailto:ilconfjusto@gmail.com). The pastor must be also be present when he visits.

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### **ALICE (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate) Training**

The Illinois Conference has been provided 50 FREE licenses for lay and clergy leaders and congregations to participate in the ALICE (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate) training. This video series will help congregations and leadership to be better prepared should anyone interrupt services and if there is an active shooter incident within a congregation. Rev. Gonzalez has secured these licenses from the UCC Insurance Board. The Illinois Conference is grateful to the Insurance Board for making this training possible.

Given recent disruptions and threatening emails that a few of our congregations have received, we encourage you to take advantage of the ALICE Training. To participate, please email Naomi at [ilconfnaomi@gmail.com](mailto:ilconfnaomi@gmail.com). Licenses cannot be forwarded or shared so we encourage you to do the training as a team. If you need one or more than one license please send Naomi the name(s) and email(s) for each individual. We will limit each community to two (2) licenses to have as many clergy, lay leaders and congregations participate in this training.

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### **Rev. Tom Norwalk, Associate Conference Minister Serving Eastern and Western Associations Announces Retirement**

[Read Retirement Announcement Here](#)

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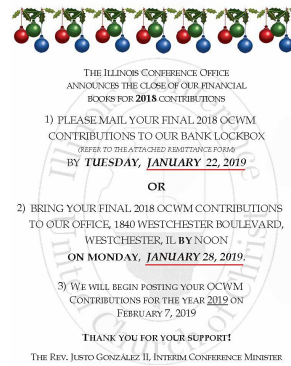
### **Illinois Conference announces the close of 2018 Our Church's Wider Mission contributions...**

We would like to extend our deepest appreciation to all our churches that have been able to meet or exceed their OCWM

goals for the year 2018.

We would also like to take this time to let all our churches know that the deadline for churches to mail in contributions to the drop box is Tuesday, Jan. 22, 2019.

If you wish to bring your OCWM contribution to the Illinois Conference office the deadline is noon on Monday, Jan. 28, 2019.



**DONATE NOW!**  
Support the Ministries of the Illinois Conference

## UCC Yearbook Submission Due: March 6, 2019

Once again it's time for our churches to participate in the annual yearbook data collection.

To login to the UCC Data Hub please go to <http://datahub.ucc.org/>. For instructions on how to submit data [click here](#).

The church's ID number is the Conference number (16) followed by the church's number. If your church is unable to complete electronically or you need additional assistance contact your Association Office. The deadline for online submission is March 6, 2019.

Thanks for all you do to help getting church records updated and accurate for the Illinois Conference.



Outdoor Ministries is excited to announce that they have launched a new online registration program and to share their event schedule for this year.

Here is the link: <https://pilgrimpark.campbrainregistration.com/>

View [2019 Outdoor Ministries Sponsored Event Schedule](#)

If you have any questions, please contact [odmregistrar@gmail.com](mailto:odmregistrar@gmail.com) or call (815) 447-2390.

## Thriving Pastors in Revitalizing Congregations (TPIRC) Lilly Grant

The Illinois Conference is currently accepting applications for pastors and churches interested in participating in *Thriving Pastors in Revitalizing Congregations* (TPIRC) Lilly Grant.

We are also accepting applications for Clergy Coaches and CCOP Small Group Facilitators who will work with TPIRC Pastors.

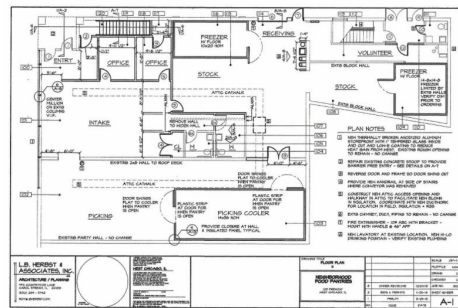
[See our website](#) or contact [lconfdavid@gmail.com](mailto:lconfdavid@gmail.com).

## New Food Pantry in West Chicago



St. Michael's United Church of Christ continues their work at the 123 Fremont Street property in preparation for becoming the future home of Neighborhood Food Pantries' in the West Chicago site.

[Read More](#)



## St. John UCC in Palatine Children's Ministry wins big

December was an exciting month for St. John UCC, Palatine. Their Children's Church Ministry won big! Darren and Cassie each received recognition in an art contest in their age class on Fire Safety hosted by The Insurance Board.



[Read More](#)



Children's time during worship this past Sunday, Jan. 13 at First Congregational UCC, Moline.



St. Peter's UCC, Champaign congregation generously supports Hurricane Michael Relief effort.



Rev. Lorrie Reed, PhD, Executive Director, conducts the first Discernment Retreat for The School For Ministry held on Jan. 11-12 in Springfield.

## Employment Opportunities

For the Interim Associate Conference Minister being called to serve the Illinois Conference UCC and Eastern and Western Associations [click here](#) to view position description outlining areas of responsibility. Deadline to apply: Feb. 12, 2019.

View [Ministerial opportunities](#) and [lay employment opportunities](#) within the Illinois Conference.

## Conference Calendar

January 20: [5th annual Polar Peace March](#), 10:00 a.m. at St. Pauls United Church of Christ, Chicago.

January 20: Rev. Chuck Maney, Interim Associate Conference Minister Serving Prairie Association, 10:00 a.m. at [First UCC in Sheffield](#) for the closing liturgy for the ministry of Interim Pastor Ross Wyman.

January 20: Rev. Tom Norwalk, Associate Conference Minister Serving Western and Eastern Associations, 10:00 a.m. at [St. John UCC in Lincoln](#) will be preaching and making a presentation following worship on the Angola Partnership Hymnal Project.

January 20: [King Day Celebration and Mayoral Forum](#), 1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. at Chicago

State University, Chicago. Sponsored by A Just Harvest.

January 20: Western Association proudly announces and invites you to attend the [Service of Ordination of Katherine Huffman Reinig](#), 4:00 p.m. at First Congregational UCC, Springfield.

January 21: [Community Renewal Society sponsors Martin Luther King Faith in Action Assembly & Mayoral Candidate Forum](#), 8:00 a.m. at Liberty Baptist Church, Chicago

January 21: [Martin Luther King Day of Service](#), 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. at Kenwood United Church of Christ, Chicago.

January 21: [Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration](#), 12:00 p.m. at First Congregational Church in Berwyn.

January 22: Chicago Metropolitan Association will convene [Ecclesiastical Council for Myra Taylor](#), 6:30 p.m. at Covenant UCC, South Holland.

January 23: [Brown Bag Forum: Discussion around anti-LGBT protest in our Churches](#), 11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. at Immanuel UCC, Streamwood.

January 27: Rev. Chuck Maney, Prairie Association Interim Associate Conference Minister, 10:00 a.m. at [Open Table UCC in Ottawa](#) for the closing liturgy for the ministry of Pastor Kim Wood.

January 27: Chicago Metropolitan Association will convene [Ecclesiastical Council for Catherine Watkins](#), 3:00 p.m. at First Congregational UCC, Evanston.

January 27: Western Association and Congregational UCC, Pekin invite to the [Installation of Rev. Judy Steger Kennedy](#), 4:00 p.m. at Congregational UCC, Pekin.

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## Upcoming Events



The Illinois Conference will convene its Annual Celebration June 7-8, at Elmhurst College. "Love in Action: Life Together," the theme our Annual Celebration.

[Follow event on Facebook](#) or [Watch here for further information as it becomes available.](#)



WISE Congregations for Mental Health Conference will be held in Oakland, California, on Saturday, March 2, 2019.

[Learn more and to register here](#)

LIVING  
OUR  
COVENANTS:  
INTO LIFE!  
NATIONAL ONA GATHERING  
JUNE 18-20, 2019  
MILWAUKEE, WI



National ONA Gathering, June 18-20, in Milwaukee! Celebrate ONA congregation #1500! Rev. Justo González II, Interim Conference Minister, will be one of the Keynote speakers.

[Register here](#)

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You're invited to the United Church of Christ's Thirty-Second General Synod! General Synod 32 will be held June 21-25 at the Wisconsin Center, located in the heart of downtown Milwaukee.



[More Info here](#)



[Visit our website](#)

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